

riding by him up Cheapside an honoured but humbled guest, we might have heard less about the poll-tax. This new financial expedient was used partly in order to tap the Church revenues, but still more in order to tax the lower classes. 'The wealth of the kingdom/ it was said, \* is in the hands of the workmen and labourers,' and the object of the House of Commons was to get it out of those hands into the coffers of the State. The workmen and labourers were already, for other reasons, in no holiday humour, and the pressure of this new burden was the last straw. Three times within four years a poll-tax was taken. The third time its levy proved the signal for the Rising.

The Parliament that met at Northampton in the winter of 1380 voted a poll-tax of a shilling a head. Each town and village was to be assessed on that basis according to its population, but \* the rich were to aid the poor' in the actual payment. The very richest were to pay not more than one pound, the very poorest married couple not less than four-pence between them.<sup>1</sup> In the actual levy, this plan was carried out. The labouring classes paid sums varying between fourpence and a shilling on each family.<sup>2</sup> This tax was not levied all at once. During the winter, a commission had gathered a part, on the basis of a return of population which it drew up in the localities. This report showed a decrease in numbers since the poll-tax census of 1377, a decrease so remarkable that it is difficult to suppose that the second return of inhabitants was really as complete as the first had been.<sup>3</sup> The King's council took the same view. On March 16 it declared that the collectors had been guilty of gross negligence and favouritism, and commissioned a new staff 'armed with large authority and powers of imprisonment, to travel from place to place, scrutinising carefully the lists of inhabitants, and forcibly compelling payment from those who had evaded it before.'<sup>4</sup> The unpopularity of this second set of commissioners was the immediate occasion of the outbreak. Everything was against the success of their enterprise. They were regarded as having come down from London to levy an entirely new poll-tax,

<sup>1</sup> *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 90.    <sup>2</sup> Powell, *Ap.* I.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 4-7.    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* o.